DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 125 027 CS 501 433

AUTHOR Klopf, Donald W.
TITLE Ethical Practices in Contemporary Debate.
PUB DATE 76
NOTE 10p.; Paper prepared for the special edition of "Communication, Journal of the Communication Association of the Pacific" compiled for the C.A.P. Convention (Kobe, Japan, June 1976)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Debate; Educational Research; Ethical Values; *Ethics; Higher Education; Integrity; Persuasive Discourse; School Surveys; Secondary Education
IDENTIFIERS Forensics

ABSTRACT

In order to answer questions about current debate ethics--as compared with the ethics of 1964--and to arrive at a contemporary viewpoint of ethical practices, a questionnaire was sent to forensics directors at 1440 colleges and universities and 376 high school directors. A list of fifty debate practices was compiled, thirty-five from the 1964 questionnaire and fifteen reflecting more contemporary debating. Respondents were to check whether they considered each item as ethical and good debate procedure, ethical but poor debate, questionable, or unethical. The results are tempered by three variables: intent, degree, and the circumstances in which the practice occurs. Conclusions drawn from the results include the fact that thirty-four practices are considered questionable or unethical by 25% or more of the respondents and the recognition that debate ethics continues to be a perplexing problem. (The fifty items and questionnaire responses are included.) (JM)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original *
****

ED125027

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Communication Assn. of the Pacific
TO ERIC AND ORGANIZATIONS OPERATING UNDER AGREEMENTS WITH THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION. FURTHER REPRODUCTION OUTSIDE THE ERIC SYSTEM REQUIRES PERMISSION OF THE COPYRIGHT OWNER.

ETHICAL PRACTICES IN CONTEMPORARY DEBATE

by Donald W. Klopf*

Presented at the Communication Association of the Pacific Convention
June 19, 1976, Kobe, Japan -- Distinguished Scholars Invitational Program

"The problem of ethics perplexes most who teach debate," wrote Klopf and McCroskey in 1964. They noted that the uncertainty occurs because practices considered ethical by some coaches are considered unethical by others with misunderstandings occasionally resulting from the differences of opinion. To help resolve the confusion they questioned high school and college coaches about ethical practices. Through their questionning, they identified the practices that the coaches believed to be ethical, questionable, and unethical.[1]

Debate has undergone change during the years that have elapsed since the Klopf-McCroskey study. A new system of propositional analysis, new affirmative cases, sophisticated negative attacks, and alterations in tournament procedures are among the changes instituted in these years. What of debate ethics? Are the unethical practices of 1964 still considered unethical? How are the questionable practices of 1964 viewed today? Are the ethical practices still considered ethical? Are there practices today that were not observed twelve years ago? If so, are they ethical?

To answer these questions and arrive at a contemporary viewpoint of ethical practices, a questionnaire similar to the 1964 one was developed and distributed in the Spring 1976. This paper presents the results of

---

Professor and Chairman, Department of Speech, University of Hawaii, Honolulu, Hawaii.

CS 501 433

that survey.

The results are tempered by three variables, ones named by Klopf and McCroskey as preventing absolute identification of unethical practices. These are intent, degree, and the circumstances in which the practice occurs.

The intent of the debater must be known, Klopf and McCroskey emphasized, before a practice can be called unethical. They reasoned that if a debater deliberately deceives, lies, or cheats, he should be penalized. If, however, he is simply ignorant of debate procedure or tournament rules, and his behavior has no implication of deceit, then the penalty, if one is needed, might be less severe. Separating the cheat from the ignorant may be a hopeless task and both, they pointed out, unfortunately, are likely to be treated equal. If such a separation could be made, ethical problems would probably occur less frequently.

Intent is related to degree, the relative number of times the practice takes place in a debate. Occurring once, a questionable practice may be overlooked. Occurring repeatedly, the same practice should be termed unethical.

Also influencing the ethical nature of these practices are the circumstances surrounding the particular debate situation. Under one set of circumstances a particular practice could be ethical; under another, unethical.[2]

While these variables prevent absolute identification and isolation of ethical practices, Klopf and McCroskey contend that the coach and debater will benefit if they know "what practices <u>might</u> be unethical or questionable <u>in spite of the variables</u>." Knowing that a practice is

considered questionable or unethical by a large number of people regardless of the variables could cause coach and debater to avoid the practice entirely. As a consequence, debate ethics could be significantly improved.[3]

Procedures

The 1964 procedures were followed with minor changes. A list of fifty debate practices was compiled, including thirty-five from the 1964 questionnaire and fifteen reflecting more contemporary debating. The additions came from a literature survey and from the suggestions of twenty-two coaches.

As in 1964, the ambiguity of items proved a problem. To eradicate ambiguity meant qualifying each item with enough examples to account for all possible variations. Such a measure was impractical for the purposes of the study.

The distributed questionnaire required the respondent to check whether each item was (1) ethical and good debate procedure, (2) ethical but poor debate, (3) questionable, and (4) unethical.

Sent to the forensics directors at 1440 colleges and universities listed in the Speech Communication Directory 1975-1976 and 376 high school directors, the results which follow indicate the attitudes of the 544 respondents. Percents are rounded to the nearest full number. Percents in parantheses represent the results for the same items in the 1964 survey.[4]

Results

	Ethical and Good Debate %	Poor Debate %	Questionable Ethics %	Unethical %
1. Debaters or coaches listening to potential opponents and recording their cases to obtain advance information for later use.	25 (6)	5 (4)	32 (38)	38 (52)
2. Either team introducing a new issue in the rebuttal.	0 (3)	25 (37)	13 (21)	62 (39)
3. Breaching normal courtesy, such as heckling, grimacing, or loud whispering while opponent is speaking.	0 (1)	8 (9)	19 (20)	73 (70)
4. Citing opinion or fact out of context in which it was written.	1 (1)	2 (4)	13 (19)	84 (76)
5. Fabricating evidence.	0 (0)	0 (1)	1 (0)	99 (99)
6. The affirmative defining the terms of the resolution in such a way as to give them a competitive advantage not inherent in the resolution.	9 (5)	26 (22)	37 (46)	28 (27)
7. The affirmative waiting to answer important issues until the final affirmative rebuttal.	4 (1)	28 (31)	30 (38)	38 (30)
8. Injecting personalities into the debate.	6 (1)	28 (28)	37 (38)	29 (33)
9. The witness taking unnecessary time in answering questions in cross-examination debate.	5 (4)	39 (35)	34 (40)	22 (21)
10. The witness conferring with colleague in cross-exam before asking or answering a question.	3 (3)	26 (36)	38 (28)	33 (33)
11. Using sarcasm	10 (3)	51 (54)	23 (22)	16 (21)
12. The negative waiting to present a counter-plan until the second negative constructive.	8 (18)	35 (33)	18 (32)	39 (17)

	Ethical and Good Debate	Poor Debate	Questionable Ethics	Unethical
	%	%	%	%
13. Arguing about the debate afterwards with the judge or opponents.	4 (4)	31 (49)	30 (20)	35 (27)
14. Using personal letters as evidence.	14 (28)	26 (38)	27 (20)	33 (14)
15. Either the affirmative or the negative failing to adapt to the opponents' arguments.	0 (0)	85 (91)	9 (5)	6 (4)
16. Either the affirmative or the negative using what is referred to as the "shotgun" case, i.e., offering many arguments with little support in an attempt to gain an advantage over the opponent.	7 (4)	76 (75)	10 (16)	7 (5)
17. Substituting emotional appeals for arguments on a specific issue in the debate.	10 (4)	70 (68)	15 (19)	5 (9)
18. Failing to identify sources of information given in the debate.	0 (1)	40 (60)	33 (26)	27 (13)
19. Failing to demonstrate qualifications of "authorities" quoted.	1 (1)	56 (81)	32 (13)	11 (5)
20. Quoting from obviously prejudiced sources.	3 (3)	73 (80)	19 (14)	5 (3)
21. The affirmative failing to present a prima facie case in its constructive speeches.	2 (1)	76 (89)	8 (4)	14 (6)
22. The affirmative defining the terms of the resolution in such a manner that they are vague and unclear.	2 (1)	68 (70)	22 (23)	8 (6)
23. The negative quibbling over the definition of terms without showing valid support for their disagreement.	1 (1)	81 (74)	13 (21)	5 (4)
24. The affirmative failing to present a clearly stated plan on a resolution.	3 (1)	74 (78)	11 (15)	12 (6)

	Ethical and Good Debate %	Poor Debate %	Questionable Ethics %	Unethical %
25. The affirmative waiting to present the plan until the very end of the second affirmative constructive speech.	9 (25)	54 (47)	19 (18)	18 (10)
26. Asking tricky and/or leading questions in cross-exam.	54 (31)	23 (30)	19 (31)	4 (8)
27. Debaters using canned speeches after the first affirmative.	5 (1)	85 (89)	7 (6)	3 (4)
28. Bombarding the opposition with a series of oral questions all of which obviously cannot be answered in the allotted time.	8 (5)	61 (55)	23 (30)	8 (10)
29. The negative shifting their main attack from the need to the plan in rebuttal when it appears the affirmative is winning the need.	65 (60)	28 (28)	6 (8)	1 (4)
30. The first affirmative constructive speaker presenting an historical background to the proposition without touching the needs which the second affirmative constructive speaker presents.	5 (1)	70 (80)	14 (14)	11 (5)
31. The coaching staff preparing cases for debaters.	4 (4)	16 (17)	23 (21)	57 (58)
32. The coaching staff writing the first affirmative speech.	4 (1)	14 (10)	22 (17)	60 (72)
33. Coaches discussing with their debaters the case of upcoming opponent whom they have judged earlier.	44 (11)	4 (6)	27 (37)	25 (46)
34. The coaching staff doing research for their debaters.	13 (4)	16 (22)	27 (32)	44 (42)
35. Using the written critique as the sole means of evaluating a debate.	40 (5)	49 (61)	11 (19)	0 (15)

	Ethical and Good Debate %	Poor Debate %	Questionable Ethics %	Unethical %
36. Sharing evidence with other schools.	69	9	16	6
37. Recruiting debaters from high schools or other colleges.	60	4	22	14
38. Using the "spread."	30	51	13	6
39. The affirmative using a "squirrel" case.	12	52	18	18
40. "Seeding" judges.	19	8	31	42
41. The judge during a debate questionning the evidence used.	46	8	23	23
42. Debaters devising strategems for unwary opponents.	63	16	16	5
43. Using the "alternative justification" case, i.e., the affirmative initiating several mini-cases supporting the ones not adequately refuted by the negative.	23	47	20	10
44. Using handbooks, cases, bibliographies, evidence cards purchased from commercial enterprises.	42	41	14	3
45. Speech or other classes doing research for debaters not in classes.	14	23	29	34
46. Power-matching in tournaments.	90	4	4	2
47. Using electrical recording instruments during a debate.	64	4	18	14
48. Coaches who are not judges listening to debates regardless of reason.	60	7	26	7
49. Using profanity.	4	28	22	46
50. Sharing flow sheets of opponent's debates with other schools.	34	11	32	23

Conclusions

This survey was designed to identify practices which debate coaches believe are ethical, questionable, or unethical. These conclusions are drawn from the results:

1. Identifying specific practices as unethical is complicated by the influence of three variables: intent, degree, and circumstances.

2. No agreement exists among coaches as to what is ethical or unethical. None of the practices drew 100% agreement, although item 5, fabricating evidence, was considered unethical by 99%. The 1964 survey also produced this conclusion.

3. Six practices were considered unethical by more than half of the respondents. These are items 2, 3, 4, 5, 31, and 32.

4. Twenty-two practices were felt to be unethical or questionable by more than half of the respondents. These are items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 18, 31, 32, 33, 34, 40, 45, 49, and 50.

5. Twelve practices were believed unethical or questionable by 25% to 50% of the respondents. These are items 11, 19, 22, 25, 28, 30, 37, 39, 41, 43, 47, and 48.

6. None of practices listed by more than half of the 1964 respondents as unethical or questionable are now listed as ethical.

7. Four practices considered by more than half of the 1964 respondents as ethical are now deemed unethical. These are items 12, 13, 14, and 18.

8. Three practices felt to be poor debate, questionable, or unethical in 1964 have shifted to the good debate category by 10% or more. These are items 26, 33, and 35.

9. Seven practices considered ethical in 1964 have shifted

slightly (10% or more) to become questionable or unethical in 1976. These are items 2, 10, 13, 14, 18, 19, and 21.

10. Four practices not included in the 1964 survey were listed as unethical or questionable by more than half of the respondents. These are items 40, 45, 49, and 50.

11. Six practices not in the 1964 survey were judged as unethical or questionable by 25% to 50% of the respondents. These are items 37, 39, 41, 43, 47, and 48.

Thirty-four practices are considered questionable or unethical by 25% or more of the respondents. This figure may be large enough for coaches and debaters to avoid the practices altogether, although intent, degree, and circumstances will influence judgements about their use.

The 1964 Klopf-McCroskey conclusion that uncertainty exists about what is ethical in debate and what is not states well the current situation. Debate ethics continues to be a perplexing problem.

Footnotes

1. Donald Klopf and James McCroskey, "Ethical Practices in Debate," Journal of the American Forensic Association, I, 1, January 1964, 13-16.

2. Klopf and McCroskey, 13.

3. Klopf and McCroskey, 13.

4. The respondents represent all sections of the nation and every state in proportions approximately equal to the original mailing. Christine Yukitomo assisted in compiling the data.